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#170-71

#160 in m/r file

29 October 1963

Notes on Meeting - about 3:30 on 29 October - Situation Room:

In Attendance: Secretary McNamara, Gen. Taylor, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, Mr. McCone, Mr. Helms, Mr. Colby

1. Draft cable -- keep Lodge in place until Saturday.

2. Taylor expressed view that coup, if either successful or unsuccessful, would have disastrous results.

3. McGeorge Bundy insisted we cannot reconsider our position with respect to support of a coup but can merely ask Embassy for further assessment.

McCone raised question of why not reconsider our support position, stating it was extremely disturbing to him, that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs had responsibility for military operations, and for military advice to the President; expressed dissatisfaction that it can not be reconsidered.

It was decided to send out a cable and get an appraisal of the prospects of the success of the coup.

#71

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Notes on Meeting at 4:00 - Cabinet Room - re South Viet Nam

In Attendance: The President, The Vice President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Attorney General, Gen. Taylor, McGeorge Bundy, Gen. Krulak, Gov. Harriman, William Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Alexis Johnson, Mendenthal, McCone, Helms, Colby

Colby briefed on the attitude of the forces, using charts indicating the disposition of forces, stating that about an equal number of key units were in support of the coup as were in support of the Government, and units totalling about 18,000 personnel were neutral. Colby also briefed on the two coup groups, the Generals and the Can Lao group, and indicated very modest interchange between the two.

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The President raised the question of the 1960 coup attempt. Colby stated that our principal effort was to get the two sides negotiating and to stop the fighting. The President expressed concern over prospect of protracted fighting - thought we should have an evaluation from the Embassy.

Rusk spoke, stated we must assume that Diem and Nhu are informed about the talks. Diem's talk with Lodge indicates Diem was informed about coup talks. Rusk questioned whether we should be silent and permit a coup to go forward and involve civil war. We should raise the question with the coup leaders as to whether the coup could be carried off without civil war. Lodge should pass this word on to Don; should indicate we are not now convinced of the outcome, therefore should demand their plans before indicating support. The President indicated Lodge should stay on his schedule, that if his departure was delayed and a coup would take place, it would be apparent that we were informed. After discussion it was decided that Lodge could leave on Saturday on military aircraft and this was agreed to. Agreed that a cable be sent to Lodge and Harkins asking for a detailed assessment of all questions relating to the coup and also outlining command arrangements after Lodge's departure.

The Attorney General took a very positive position, questioning the communication that was proposed and indicating grave doubts of the wisdome of our proceeding with a program which seemed to spell defeat because of failure of a coup or political confusion following a coup, if successful. He thought the consequences of failure in South South Vietnam would be the loss of Southeast Asia to the communists. NOTE: He in effect was repeating my statement to him at lunch last week. General Taylor repeated his views which were to the effect that a successful coup was no guarantee of success.

I repeated what I had said on 25 October at my meeting with the President, McNamara, Bundy, AG, and Taylor. A coup if attempted might result in some form of civil war in which the Viet Cong would win by sitting on the sidelines or, if successful, would result in an extended period of political confusion during which time the war might be adversely affected and possibly lost and furthermore a period of political unrest would probably result in a second or perhaps a third coup.

JAM/mfb
(Helms or Colby to prepare full notes of the above meetings)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

MCN - McC - Taylor - Bundy - W Bundy
Helms Cobb

1) Cobb - Keep Fodge on phone
2) Taylor - Result of Camp
3) Bundy - Cannot recommend
4) McCone - Wkly mail —
5) Send mil cable to get approval

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Rusk VP WGM - Taylor Rowland - WJS -
Forrestal - MCB - Rusk - Han - AG -
Alex Johnson - Mendenhall - McC
Helms - Cobby

Cobby - Briefing of attitudes of
forces - Same conclusions as
Mikuno - Key words abroad Land -
2 Camps groups - Kenneth and Cuban
can see.
Questions re 1960 Camp attempt

Rusk - assume Does N has informed
other Latins - Lodge Task indicates
Does on knows - Should we be
silent - Should we resume
questions of Civil war -
Not convinced of outcome -
Lodge should pass this word to Don

Rusk - Lodge stay on schedule
Will discuss departure - Hesitation
re Change -

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MEMORANDUM

1. Diem-Lodge discussions produced no movement in the direction of political action to satisfy our wishes. Also Diem insinuations indicate his knowledge of U. S. officials familiar with coup planning.

2. Knowledge of Generals' coup planning by at least two civilians outside of government would indicate sufficient talking in Saigon so that at least some of the plans are known to Diem and Nhu.

3. The security measures are an improvement.

4. Analysis of SVN forces in Saigon area indicate three groups; neutral, pro-government, which is probably the largest and pro-coup which is smaller but still a larger force than in August.

5. Discussion of assesse of prospects of a coup. Quite probable that action will be postponed from time to time for favorable developments. On the other hand a coup attempt could be made momentarily.

6. If successful political difficulties will follow and confusion will exist for a protracted period.

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